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Claims 1-13 (Cancelled)

said step of forming said laminate for magnetic data recording is at least one method selected from the group consisting of sputtering, ion plating, plasma CVD, and vacuum deposition.

said step of forming said protective layer is a method selected from the group consisting of sputtering, ion plating, plasma CVD, and vacuum deposition.

Claim 16 (Currently Amended) A method for manufacturing a thin-film magnetic recording medium, comprising the steps of, according to claim 13, wherein:

said step of forming being a dry process in a vacuum atmosphere;

forming a protective layer on said laminate;

said step of forming a protective layer being a dry process in a vacuum atmosphere;

plasma-etching a first surface of said protective layer;

said step of plasma-etching conducted in a vacuum and in a process gas mixture comprising an inert gas, an oxygen gas, and a nitrogen gas ~~said process gas mixture and~~ further comprising a gas selected from the group consisting of a chlorine gas and a fluorine gas;

conducting the steps of forming a laminate, forming a protective layer, and plasma-etching continuously; and

forming a lubricant layer on said first surface of said protective layer, whereby surface defects are minimized and surface quality is greatly improved.

Claim 17 (Cancelled)

Claim 18 (Original) A method according to claim 15 wherein:

said step of plasma-etching is conducted in a process gas mixture contain the process gas mixture of Ar, O₂, and N₂ where the mixing ratio thereof is substantially 6: 1: 3.

Claims 19-20 (Cancelled)